A System Where Everyone Wins: The Legitimacy of Faith-Based Schools in a System of Choice

by Steven C. Vryhof

In 2002, when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized public vouchers for use in religious schools (*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris,* 122 S. Ct. 2460), the battle over school choice, rather than being ended, was actually begun in earnest. But now the fight involves "Blaine amendments": state-level constitutional amendments passed in the nineteenth century to prohibit public funds from reaching parochial schools. Proponents of public schools, reacting to the Supreme Court decision, were clear on their intent: expect lawsuits. Proponents of vouchers, reacting to the Blaine amendments still out there, were equally clear: expect lawsuits. And so educators, legislators, and policymakers continue the debate.

One aspect of the debate remains the most intriguing to me: Should the choice options include private schools, some of which have an explicitly religious orientation? I wonder if the usual institutions allowed into the debate—unions, teacher-training institutions, accrediting agencies, lobbyists, and other professional groups—deal much with "religious orientations" and how they could or should shape schooling. Position papers, press releases, and even radio ads most often deal with more advanced technology and longer days, newer textbooks and higher pay, smaller classes and better teacher training, narrower standards and more frequent testing, and especially, more money. Is religiously oriented schooling even on the educational establishment's radar? Do its members even have the language, the fluency, the conceptual framework to hold a debate?

Reexamining the Purpose of Schools

It seems to me the fights over vouchers, or merit pay, or standardized testing gloss over the central issues of schooling and its purpose. We need to keep asking: What are schools *for?* Indeed, what is *life* for? I suggest

that children grow into responsible adults through their engagement with what I call "communities of meaning," which are manifest to most observers as simply "functional communities." Compared to an increasingly fragmented society and community-poor world, functional communities successfully reproduce themselves by preserving and passing on to their children a cultural *memory*—their story, their identity, their cultural anchor points—and a *vision*—their imagined future, their world-and-life view, designed to provide motivation and meaning for a lifetime.

Schools have a *role* in preserving and passing on the memory of the community and its vision for the future. Those are often faith issues, and we do ourselves a grave disservice to ignore them when we debate.

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Given such an understanding of schooling and its purpose, I think, at the least, that battles over vouchers, testing, and other issues become clearer, and that, specifically, faith-based schools have a legitimate place in a system of choice. My position is that faith-based schools generally contain the "norms and networks" needed to achieve functional community and therefore represent a powerful positive force in meeting the challenges to American education. I also believe that faith-based schools could be considered more "public" than the public schools in that they express the aspirations and desired freedoms of their citizen parents, and that as a result, in even the narrowest sense of education they educate better for less money. I believe that if we are to draw on all our resources to improve American education, and if we are to honor our heritage of democratic pluralism as well, we must make faith-based schooling available to all parents who want it, not just those who can afford it.

The Lessons of History

Faith-based schools have, of course, existed in America since the 1600s. To appreciate fully the legitimacy of "sectarian education" (i.e., faith-based schooling), one must be aware of the original standing of faith-based schools in the United States and understand how they lost out to government-run schools—a story that spans three centuries and is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this essay.[1] Suffice it to say that a complex progression of factors, including eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking, nineteenth-century social conditions, and twentieth-century court decisions have resulted in the concentration of enormous financial, legal, and cultural power in government-run schools.

The proponents of almost every philosophy of education recognize that as a result of those factors, public schools effectively enjoy a monop-

oly in the United States today. Proponents of faith-based schooling point as well to the resulting predominance of a public school ethos characterized by cultural, moral, and religious relativism—an ethos that is fundamentally contrary to their own despite the fact that proponents of faith-based schooling practice almost every variant of every faith found in the United States and disagree significantly with each other on every major religious tenet except one: the importance of religion itself. Proponents of faith-based schooling point out further that the current public-school ethos, supported by taxpayer dollars, cannot be challenged in any meaningful way, that those who would do so may only dissent, usually at their own expense.

Proponents of faith-based schools are by no means the only people bridling under the rigidity of public education in America today. The groundswell in support of distinctive schools and parental choice is secular, not faith-based. Horace Mann may have wanted uniformity, neutrality, and central control, but our educational world longs for flexibility, meaning, and freedom. For those who take the American ideal of democratic pluralism seriously, the question becomes: *Is it possible to design a system in which everyone wins?*

Social Capital and Functional Community

Over the centuries societies have designed ways to transfer to the young both memory and vision to form a community of meaning, a functional community, which successfully replicates itself. Rituals, stories told around campfires, pictographs, symbolic objects, sacred books, the details of lifestyle—all could tell the young where their people had been and what they were called to be and do for the future. In modern times, societies have become increasingly dependent on one method of cultural transfer. We call it schooling. The school provides not only memory, the past, but an imagined future, the vision, as well. We live for a future of peace and love, of happiness and well-being, of prosperity and progress. The full expression of those cultural dimensions, memory and vision, shapes us into a community. The full expression of those dimensions in an individual shapes our identities. If a community is to survive, if we are to survive, both memory and vision must be preserved and passed on.

Anthony J. Gittins underscores the importance of community in shaping identity:

> For millennia, traditional rites of passage have forged people into communities and strengthened them for the tasks and transitions and pains of life. Those who share experience and aspirations through tales told round fires are thereby becoming a privileged group, bonded by their vicarious strength and courage. Those who create and nourish their identity through songs sung under

the stars are, in that very activity, encoding memories that are actual modifications of the neural pathways of the brain. Common celebrations like storytelling and singing—or ritual and liturgy—change brain chemistry and thus create a common memory that subsequent celebrations can evoke. But a community with nothing to celebrate will lose its identity. If ritual dies, the community dies: It is only a matter of time.[2]

128

The world has changed. As the noted sociologist James S. Coleman observed, "The major changes in social context have been twofold: the destruction of functional communities based on residence, and the realignment of value communities around some dimension other than residence."[3] In that new educational world, schooling has become even more important as a major institution for raising children, and as a result, schools have become cultural battlegrounds where parents, educators, and policymakers have vied for control over the hearts and minds of the next generation. The education battle becomes most heated when the discussion turns toward religion, religious issues, or religious expression.

Coleman reinforces and clarifies the issues with important nomenclature, suggesting that a functional community is one that enjoys "value consistency," a shared understanding of what the world is about, what is important, and how the group should live, together with "intergenerational closure," the adult-child relationships and the opportunities to activate them, which allow for the successful transfer of the community's values. Together, value consistency and intergenerational closure make up what Coleman calls "social capital." He suggests that besides physical capital (buildings, tools) and human capital (skills, knowledge, capabilities), a nurturing environment for a child must also include social capital, which he defines as "the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up."[4]

Value consistency, then, is the common set of values and expectations generally shared by members of the community. Intergenerational closure requires healthy social bonds between adults and children that enable the transfer of accepted values. Those norms and networks augment "the resources available to parents in their interactions with school, in their supervision of their children's behavior, and in their supervision of their children's associations, both with others their own age and with adults."[5] In other words, where the functional community provides value consistency and intergenerational closure, norms, and networks, it is parents, relatives, known friends, helpful neighbors, trusted teachers, and acceptable peers—living people, rather than gangs and television, impersonal manifestations of pop culture—who inculcate the child's values and monitor the child's development. What mode of schooling, and what public policy for funding and overseeing schooling,

best facilitates such development in children? And where would "religious orientation" fit in the discussion?

It takes a village to raise a child, we say. Villages are understood to be small, a place where everybody knows everybody else. The children know the adults; the adults know the children. The children know the adults care about them; they trust the adults and are willing to take their cues from them. A strong interdependency is understood by everyone in the village. A shared understanding of ultimate meanings and purpose characterizes the members of the tribe. If a child misbehaves or fails at

a necessary skill, other adults as well as the parents step in to admonish and advise. Because the survival of the village depends on children growing up to be dependable, productive adults, everyone sees to it. Together the adult community trains the children in all the life skills and at the same time inculcates the values of the tribe, its history, its stories of memory, and its specific vision of the future. To what degree can our schools support the functioning of such "villages"?

A Different Cultural World

In modern societies, the quest for functional community—for ways of preserving memory and passing on vision—grows increasingly difficult. Powerful new cultural understandings of the purpose of schooling, increased mobility, weakened family ties, slackened religious faith, and the pervasive effects of a media culture have atomized memory and vision for modern people. Times have changed, leaving us with bewildering, unanswered questions. What have we gained in the past few generations, with our densely populated communities, with our expectation that most adults will participate in the workplace, our greater geographical and social mobility, our swift means of communication, our powerful beyond-the-family institutions, and our endless forms of entertainment? Are we preserving memory? Are we cultivating vision? Do graduates of our schools have meaning and purpose, memory and vision, as well as passing scores on state tests and the required number of Carnegie units?

With fewer of the social supports necessary for becoming successful adults, and with an almost endless array of influences that are, in too many cases, of debatable benefit, children today are at greater risk of growing up rootless and directionless. Although the two pillars of functional community are value consistency and intergenerational closure, a host of secondary requirements is necessary. Achieving value consistency requires time, attention, thoughtfulness, reading, writing, discussion, direct teaching, meditation, reflection, and quiet. Intergenerational closure requires direct, loving, frequent, and highly communicative links between adults and children. Our modern world—loud, fast-paced, relentlessly changing, peer-dominated—in many ways militates against functional community. There is little time for quiet, for attending to the more thoughtful questions of life, little time for connecting to an older, wiser generation. A host of pervasive and powerful forces shapes us, our values, and our worldviews, in ways we rarely comprehend. Those forces of modern life, symbols of progress in one context, make value consistency and intergenerational closure difficult if not well-nigh impossible.

The following poem evokes our situation, even though it was written by Edna St. Vincent Millay decades before the advent of the Internet:

Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour,
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower
Of facts . . . They lie unquestioned,
*   uncombined.*
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill
Is daily spun, but there exists no loom
To weave it into the fabric. . . .

A meteoric shower of facts: certainly an apt description of the way we do schooling in the Information Age. Neil Postman adds,

> We have transformed information into a form of garbage, and ourselves into garbage collectors. . . . [W]e are awash in information without even a broom to help us get rid of it. Information comes indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, in enormous volume, at high speeds, severed from import and meaning. And there is no loom to weave it all into fabric. No transcendent narratives to provide us with moral guidance, social purpose, intellectual economy. No stories to tell us what we need to know, and what we do not need to know.[6]

Or, as Louis Rossetto put it, "In this age of information overload, the ultimate luxury is meaning and context."

A loom to weave it all into fabric: transcendent narratives, stories, meaning, context. Those are the tools of functional community, and they become more difficult to attain the more we immerse ourselves in today's meteoric shower of facts. As Postman suggests, moral guidance and social purpose, key elements of value consistency, are not well served by the blinding speed and contextual poverty of technology. We live in a browsing society that focuses on the shallowest, most hype-oriented aspects of life. A poet, Anna Kamienska, captures it perfectly: "Our time's original sin is our unlimited access to all kinds of the most complex knowledge combined with the inability to remember the simple knowledge of good and evil."

In such a world, what become the educational issues of the day? More computers? More frequent standardized testing? Longer days and year-round schooling? The solutions disturbingly resemble the causes of the problems. And they leave out a huge resource and potential solution: religious faith.

The Limits of Government Schools

Religious faith may not be the only source of moral guidance and social purpose, but it is the one upon which most people have relied throughout history. By law and by ethos, the public schools marginalize

religious faith. Such is inadequate education. By determining and driving all aspects of the school environment, from textbook selection to assessment to "teacher-proof" ways of instructing, public schools reduce, constrain, oversimplify, and limit learning to the transfer of factual knowledge because that can be *measured*. Such is inadequate pedagogy. The public school education agenda is too often set by textbook publishers appealing to entire states, legislatures attuned to political winds, unions focused on employment issues, accreditation agencies intent on greater influence, and, recently, corporations with an eye on profits. Such is inadequate public policy. There is little room for parental wishes, family expectations, individual needs, gifts, or interests, little room for memory and vision, for the transcendent, for larger meaning and purpose, for spontaneity and freedom, for reconciliation and greater social purpose—and yes, for religious orientation, for God.

The result, complains Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, is that there is an almost total absence of any inside view. She claims words such as *faith, love, heart, soul, sorrow, pain, pride, greed,* and *evil* are almost never used in the public school context. A religious and spiritual vacuum exists in modern public schooling, with profound implications for functional community:

> The ability to attend to the mysteries of life, to confess ignorance or partial understanding, is not part of the present system of education. To the contrary, the curriculum supposes that all problems are solvable, and that view undoubtedly contributes to despair and cynicism when students find out that it is not true. Ignorance of the world's religions and of the timeless human issues portrayed in the humanities not only predisposes young people to opt for the high-tech, me-first values being promoted today, but leaves them helpless to understand the powerful forces at work in the world—and in themselves.[7]

The loss of larger meanings and purposes has a direct effect on our daily lives. When we lost extended families, close-knit neighborhoods, and communities that provided connection, we lost moral reinforcers. Broken homes, substance abuse, runaway consumerism, gangs, alcoholism, teen suicide, poverty, free-floating anxiety about the future and the meaning of life—how much of the deterioration in the fabric of North American society can be attributed to what has happened to our communities? What is the relationship between the way our schools are sponsored (usually by the state), structured (often impersonally), and oriented (usually competitively), and grounded (in a moral and religious relativism), and our felt loss of community?

Faith-Based Schooling

Faith-based schools by definition are embedded in communities of meaning with worldviews that are profound and far-reaching, with values that are deep and abiding. Such schools provide a more seamless whole for the child growing up, connecting her to habits, expectations, beliefs, and a community culture that provide the norms and networks, the consistency and care, the wisdom and the support necessary for attaining mature adulthood.

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Daniel Gordis gives this example that suggests the role of the sacred in functional community:

> There are moments in our lives when we desperately wish to be moved, when we submit to ritual willingly. Many formerly secular or unaffiliated Jews are returning to the world of Jewish ritual because they find that Jewish life moves them as nothing else can. Newcomers to a traditional Shabbat evening meal are often struck, not by the religious elements of the evening, but by the human dimension of Shabbat. What stays with them is the simple sight of parents placing their hands on children to bless them, or of a husband singing a song of praise and love to his wife. The memories that linger are those of families gathered around a table singing, of genuine celebration and festivity somehow created in the very midst of a hectic and often numbing pace of life.[8]

Such a perception has contributed to the growth of Jewish day schools. Historically, Jews have been among the strongest supporters of public education. Such support is apparently under scrutiny as, increasingly, Jewish parents are opting for Jewish schools where, they believe, the children are given a strong foundation in Judaism as a way to strengthen their sense of identity and help them, as one parent put it, "deal with what life throws at them." "We want our children to understand that we're in a covenant with God," explains Cheryl Finkel, the head of Epstein, a Jewish school. "And that this goes back a long time, and that Jews are chartered with a responsibility to be a blessing to the world. . . ." An Epstein parent agrees: "One thing they have learned from their school is that they are a product of ancestry . . . and I think they really do get it, that this is something that is continually passed on, and that they will pass it on. This idea that you're not the beginning and the end of the world is very important."[9]

Reformed Christian school proponents would agree. For them, Christianity is not simply a Sunday thing, a church thing, a soul thing, a heaven thing. It is an all-of-life thing. Their God-given mandate is *shalom*, universal wholeness and delight. Nothing is beyond the implications of their faith. The world, including all aspects of culture, is the arena for God's goodness. So the task of schooling is to work out such implications in every area of life and to equip students to work for shalom, not just for self or family or church, but for the good of all.

None of the languages spoken by the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico has a specific word for religion. It is simply, they say, the proper way to live one's life. Devotion to the well-being of one's tribe and family is paramount. Reverence for Mother Earth and her people cannot be separated from everyday existence.[10] Their deepest understandings permeate all aspects of their daily living; nothing is compartmentalized into religious or nonreligious areas.

People need and deserve that kind of seamlessness in their modern lives. They need the opportunities to live out their most deeply held beliefs and values in all aspects of life, including education. A more expansive view of the purposes of schooling would include the legitimacy of faith-based perspectives and ways of pursuing education. The technical and rationalistic approaches to modern education, the lowest-common-denominator morality, the presentation of science without the presentation of the limits of science, the extraordinary power of government, unions, and teacher-training institutions—all need to be reexamined and a new system installed that allows for multiple institutional expression. Religion cannot and should not be a sector of life. The price of religiously neutral education is becoming too high.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, staff members from LearnNow, a network of for-profit charter schools, knocked on the doors of Hmong refugees living in the Frogtown neighborhood. They explained that their charter school would be staffed by Hmong educators who could understand the needs of Hmong children and that the school would focus on literacy and math as well as the traditions of Hmong culture. How far are members of a democratic and pluralist society willing to extend that model? Could this be the beginning of a system in which everyone wins?

Why Faith-Based Schooling Works

Faith-based schools work because they are grounded in beliefs and value systems, worldviews, that resonate deeply in matters of religion and right living. Those worldviews, and there are many, go well beyond the generic civic-mindedness of most public or government schools. While public schools advocate civic values—honesty, respect for individuals, respect for property, doing your best, and the like—faith-based

schools try to raise the bar, upholding higher standards of conduct by grounding them in a religious context that requires *commitment,* the essence of social capital.

Interestingly, non-faith or nonpracticing parents are often "called into check" by the admissions process of a faith-based school. They apply to the school for educational reasons but are forced to gauge commitment, to locate their life of faith (or lack thereof) in their family context. Some families admit to themselves, "We're going to have to do something about that area as a whole family. This isn't like taking a swimming class at the YMCA."

The suggestion here is that religious faith and values, and their expression in human behavior as virtues, do not appear in a vacuum. Virtues need to be grounded in a viewpoint, a more complex worldview that gives a fuller account of human experience, that resonates more fully with reality in its many corners, and that, to a significant extent, explains the unexplainable. Effective schooling requires an explicit, acknowledged faith, spiritual in nature whether God is a part of it or not.

Religious faith may not be the only way to meaning and purpose, morality and identity, memory and vision, but it certainly has the longest track record of reaching such goals. Nonetheless, consider again how a postmodern world undercuts religious faith and its twin components of memory and vision. Craig van Gelder observed:

> Life is lived more and more in the present tense, with the contingencies of the past and the possibilities of the future diminishing in importance. The search to find and/or state the central thesis, grand narrative, or essential principles of life has given way to an acceptance of pluralistic alternatives and competing viewpoints. . . . The paradigm of modernism with its search for the center has shifted to a postmodern one characterized by helping persons understand that there is no such center, only plural possibilities of perspectives.[11]

The loss cannot be limited to some abstract, philosophical "belief" that matters not in any significant sense. Loss of belief is directly connected to loss of community. Schools that acknowledge matters of faith are one tool that can help stave off the erosion.

Why It Matters

In a world of laugh tracks, celebrity shills, computer-enhanced photos, Web-inspired "buzz," and political disinformation, it is difficult to know what's real, how we've been misled, or what to believe. In educational settings where religious faith is privatized and marginalized, we have no resource, no plumbline for use in discerning what's true, what's

good, and what's right, for making our way in the world. Consider again the marginalization of faith due to the breakneck pace of modern life and the overload of activities available. C. S. Lewis, in a fair summary of that point, wryly observes,

> The avoiding [of God] in many times and places has proved so difficult that a very large part of the human race failed to achieve it. But in our own time and place it is extremely easy. Avoid silence, avoid solitude, avoid any train of thought that leads off the beaten track. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health, and (above all) on your own grievances. Keep the radio on. Live in a crowd. Use plenty of sedation. If you must read books, select them carefully. But you'd be safer to stick to the newspapers. You'll find the advertisements helpful; especially those with a sexy or snobbish appeal.[12]

Because faith-based schools provide a "plumbline for use in discerning what's true, what's good, what's right, for making our way in the world," they can, in one sense, be seen as an antidote to some of the ills of modern life.

Some have suggested, however, that "imposing" a worldview or set of beliefs on children before they are, say, eighteen years old is oppressive and unfair. Children, they think, should be allowed to choose their belief systems when they reach some perceived age of enlightenment. But such thinking usually only applies as a knee-jerk reaction to the real perceived problem: religion. We will teach hygiene and basketball and piano and manners and fair play and a host of other practices, often in the face of the child's resistance, never questioning whether equipping the child with those skills or practices or values is helpful or fair or life-enhancing. And we don't expect the children in later years to resent having a preference for cleanliness or the ability to play the piano; indeed, many look back and, in retrospect, are grateful to their parents for supplying such training. In the same way, children can look back with gratitude to parents who equipped them with a religious faith that later in life enabled them to stand the light of day and endure the dark of night.

Achievement and Social Bonds

The thrust of this essay has been the educational importance of meaning, purpose, context, and faith. But we should note that the positive effect of faith-based schools on academic achievement has been proven again and again: such schools educate better, often for less money. Coleman and Hoffer, the first to posit this "Catholic school effect," suggested that functional community or social capital factors facilitate the scholastic achievement of students from disadvantaged

groups.[13] Value consistency and intergenerational closure seemed to compensate for shortages of resources among lower socioeconomic groups. Bryk and Driscoll found similar results that they attributed to the "communitarian difference," which they described as a system of shared values, a common agenda of activities, a distinctive pattern of social relations embodying an ethos of caring.[14] Their results: teachers reported greater work satisfaction, while students misbehaved less often, dropped out less, and showed more interest.

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My own work researching schools under the Christian Schools International (CSI) umbrella, a set of schools in a Reformed Protestant tradition, reinforced the conclusions based on those studies of Catholic schools. The effects of socioeconomic status are less in CSI schools; in other words, the schools counter a student's lack of resources; in other words, those schools are more egalitarian.

What accounts for such results? It appears likely that the conditions of sponsorship of those nonpublic schools—parental control, a shared vision, an explicit world-and-life view, a reinforcing network of teachers, pastors, peers, the gathering together with a common religious-educational purpose—foster value consistency and intergenerational closure. Although we still cannot pinpoint the functional community measures responsible, we seem to have encouraging evidence that such schools are more effective in producing greater academic achievement.

Objections and Protests

Positive results for private and faith-based schools, however, do not please the educational establishment in America. In the real world, non-public schools remain a source of contention. Their academic superiority is explained away as a trick of selection. Few admit that their success might be due to functional community issues. The vocal critics of such schools also claim that they "segregate and segment" society, blocking the societal ideal of integration and promoting the societal "no-no" of intolerance.

But the charges are not supported by evidence or experience. Charles Glenn, whose essay appears earlier in this issue, oversaw urban schools and integration in Massachusetts for many years. Much of his professional career involved addressing the challenge of racial integration. His politically incorrect conclusion: "What we have learned is that integration achieved through voluntary measures is more likely to produce stable and educationally effective schools and classrooms. Well-

designed school choice is the most powerful means we have been able to discover for promoting such integration."[15]

One explanation for such successful integration is that faith-based schools seek to develop in students voices of conscience—the comprehensive ideals that encourage them to reach out broadly to others—rather than only material self-interest. The same story appears when we look at the issue of tolerance. Perhaps ironically, although tolerance is identified as one of the most important values taught by public schools, the evidence now starting to come in suggests that children from non-public schools are *more* tolerant than children from public schools. John E. Coons writes:

> There is no evidence that graduates of private schools typically aim to throttle the civil rights of others. What we do know of them cuts exactly the other way. Meanwhile, the really successful merchant of intolerance may be the public system of assignment, in which the poor have choice of neither school nor curriculum. The inner-city clients of that system see plainly that *their* views of the good and the true are despised; they, in turn, have little reason to tolerate the views of others. . . . If tolerance has not been a conspicuous product of the public curriculum, could it be that . . . children must learn respect for the ideals of others by first grasping those of their own parents[?] There is certainly no evidence to the contrary.[16]

Perhaps, then, children in faith-based schools—who know full well that their beliefs, values, and worldview are unique, but who seem to want to cut people who believe differently some slack—are simply applying the Golden Rule. That should not come as a surprise. Indeed, a philosopher, Kelly James Clark, insists such tolerance from religious people makes a great deal of sense:

> Religious commitment can and should provide ample justification for religious tolerance. Religious beliefs, at least a great many of them, contain the conceptual resources for the flourishing of tolerance. Although religious believers are often intolerant, specific religious beliefs can and should motivate practitioners to principled tolerance. . . . [T]olerance makes sense only against a backdrop of deep religious and moral conviction.[17]

Indeed, as one looks over the cultural landscape, the one form of intolerance that continues to thrive is disdain bordering on contempt of the cultural elite for the deeply religious: those for whom religion is not a preference but a conviction.

Living with Differences

Affirming our religious orientations in educational settings may be all well and good; however, we live in a pluralistic, profoundly interconnected world and we also have to learn to deal with differences. We must press for community and rootedness, but we cannot ignore issues of Balkanization, of shutting out, of the charge that people, communities, and institutions "segregate and segment society," of so enclosing ourselves in our own frameworks and our own points of view that we lose the civility, the desire, and even the ability to communicate and share with others. As Garrison Keillor put it, "In a democracy, we need a few reality checkpoints at which we all crowd together, nabob and yahoo, and rub elbows and get a clue about who lives here other than us."[18]

We must not romanticize community. Close-knit communities can be supportive and nurturing; they can also frequently harbor deep-seated fear of the customs and beliefs of other subcultures. For both practical and principled reasons, pluralism must be embraced. We have to allow for nondestructive differences to flourish; otherwise, endless tension and confrontation would undo civil society. If we can agree on some non-negotiables—respect for others, the sanctity of life, the importance of the public good, honesty and fair dealing, stewardship of the environment, promotion of community, both local and worldwide—we could be far along the road toward a genuinely democratic, pluralistic world. While clinging to our roots, our values, and our worldviews, we can also assume a stance of humility that acknowledges that each of us, or even all of us, could be wrong. And we can be open to letting others shape and influence us.

One possible way out of the problem posed by strong religious faith in a pluralistic world is to pursue the idea of the "rooted cosmopolitan." We need to be *rooted* in our families, our communities, our values, our faith, our worldview, but we also need to be *cosmopolitan*, able to understand, relate to, respect, if not appreciate, anyone from anywhere at any time. If we imagine a spectrum with being *rooted* on one end and being *cosmopolitan* on the other, we would probably incorrectly see faith-based schools as rooted and secular schools as cosmopolitan. One might think that the best position on the spectrum should be somewhere in the middle, not quite rooted and not quite cosmopolitan, not taking your faith too seriously and not affirming everything in sight, and, indeed, that is probably where many of us end up by default.

But the problem is that the middle could be a no man's land. Perhaps we should think of positioning ourselves, personally and institutionally, *on both ends* of the spectrum: both fiercely rooted *and* fiercely cosmopolitan. Instead of living divided lives, of having a foot in each of two puddles, our religious side and our secular side, we should be able

to stand with both feet in the educational puddle of our understood worldview, while vigorously engaging in dialogue with people standing in the educational puddle of their choice.

The kind of citizen needed for the twenty-first century is a person committed to the whole of society, unwilling to wall himself in or others out. Everyone counts. Such rooted cosmopolitans welcome others into their homes, arrange for exchange students, have friends from other religions and other parts of town, attend camps that promote friendship across ethnic and economic differences, and travel to experience other cultures. Rooted cosmopolitans believe one adage is still true: we have the most to learn from those most different from us. If rooted cosmopolitans would become a primary goal of education, schools could focus on both preserving and enhancing the values, faith, and worldview of the community of meaning as well as provide frequent and respectful exchanges and dialogues with people from other traditions. Such educational opportunities would be the true mark of a tolerant society.

A System Where Everyone Wins

I have suggested that faith-based schooling can and should be *one* tool available to *all* parents (not just those who can afford it) in order to achieve functional community. Far from endangering the Republic, faith-based schools improve the common good by building functional communities in ways a public school monopoly cannot. If we take our heritage of democratic pluralism seriously, faith-based schools should be put on a more level playing field, not only to achieve more widespread academic achievement and more equitable educational funding, but also to preserve and enhance the social fabric that holds us together as human beings. The primary concern should be to provide communities with a school agenda that goes beyond the usual reasons for education—national development and individual flourishing—to those that bring genuine pluralism to society and greater meaning and purpose to the individual.

Although the public school system born 150 years ago may have served to indoctrinate immigrant children in the American way of life, that purpose has resulted today in an essential injustice: there is no place in the public schools for those who cannot or choose not to leave their backgrounds behind. Our population is ever more diverse, making it all the more important for parents, not the state, to have the greatest say in their children's schooling, but public school educators are permitted to offer only lowest-common-denominator education, devoid of the larger concerns of religion, worldview, life purpose, and functional community.

The solution? Simply put, a *set* of diverse schools—government schools, private schools, faith-based schools, same-sex schools, special-discipline schools, distinct-educational-philosophy schools—could bet-

ter meet the needs of a diverse population and would better meet the demands of the American ideal of justice. School choice has specific benefits: 1) it provides empowerment and ownership; 2) it enables teaching a morality and a worldview that are coherent and genuine; 3) it fosters excellence and efficiency through competition; and 4) it corrects an essential injustice; it is a requirement of democratic pluralism.

Objections to vouchers and other school-choice options must not be allowed to distract us from the deeper, more fundamental, issues surrounding the public school monopoly: the injustice in a free society that the state, not the parents, determines the objectives and modes of education and the absurdity of claiming that education can be "neutral."

The recently initiated debate surrounding faith-based schools in a system of choice begins by acknowledging that education depends on a community of meaning, that the key factors are relationships and a value system, that faith-based schools often do it better, that education goes better when children are in the schools where they want to be and their parents want them to be. In such a system, everyone wins.

Notes

1. Among many historical analyses, four in my opinion stand out: Rockne M. McCarthy et al., *Society, State, and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience 1876–1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); and Charles L. Glenn, *The Myth of the Common School* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987).

2. Anthony J. Gittins, *Reading the Clouds: Mission Spirituality for New Times* (Ligouri, Mo.: Ligouri Publications, 1999).

3. James S. Coleman and Thomas Hoffer. *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 15.

4. Ibid., 36. See also James S. Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); and James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory,* Chapter Twelve (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990).

5. Ibid., 7.

6. Quoted in *Utne Reader* (July-August 1995), 35.

7. Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, "The Values Vacuum," *American Educator* (Fall 1987): 16.

8. Daniel Gordis, "Putting Ritual Back in Spiritual," *Moment* (October 1995), 36–37.

9. Jeff Archer, "Breaking for Tradition," *Education Week* 17:27 (March 18, 1998): 36–42.

10. Michael Hice, "Pueblo Society," *Santa Fe Visitors Guide* (1998).

11. Craig Van Gelder, "Postmodernism as an Emerging Worldview," *Calvin Theological Journal* 26:2 (November 1991): 412–417.

12. C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975): 168.

13. Coleman and Hoffer, *Public and Private High Schools*.

14. A. S. Bryk and M. E. Driscoll, *The High School as Community: Contextual Influences and Consequences for Students and Teachers* (Madison, Wis.: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, 1988).

15. Charles Glenn, "What's Really at Stake in the School Choice Debate?" *The Clearing House* (Nov.-Dec. 1992): 75–78.

16. John E. Coons, "Commentary: 'Choice' Plans Should Include Private Options," *Education Week* (January 17, 1990), 52.

17. Kelly James Clark, *Calvin College Spark* (Fall 2000).

18. Garrison Keillor, "Who Do They Think They Are?" *Time* (December 2, 2002), 110.

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